

*Washington, DC - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement in opposition to H.R. 1229, legislation that would cut short environmental reviews designed to prevent oil spills from reaching America's shores. The congressman voted against the bill.*

"With gas prices rising along with record profits for big oil companies, Congress should focus on what is actually causing the problem. Instead, the Republican majority is singularly focused on drilling for more oil and their method of achieving that end is a reckless policy that cuts short environmental reviews designed to prevent future oil spills. It hasn't even been a year since we staunched the flow of oil from the Deep Horizon spill in the Gulf, and already too many members of Congress have forgotten the billions of dollars in economic damages and irreparable environmental harm that was done.

"The Energy Information Agency tells us that even if we were to double our offshore drilling we wouldn't see prices fall for almost ten years and that even then gas prices would only fall 3 to 4 cents per gallon. In addition, the United States has become a net exporter of refined petroleum products, such as fuel for our cars, for the first time in 20 years. That means more drilling won't solve the problem.

"This bill tells the Interior Department that if its officials do not complete a full review of any new offshore drilling permit within 60 days, then that permit is automatically approved, regardless of the potential environmental impacts. This policy would be a huge mistake. It will dramatically increase the risk of more oil spills and may actually have the perverse effect of stopping new offshore leases because responsible regulators may find it necessary to just deny lease requests simply because the proper reviews cannot be completed within the arbitrary 60 day window.

"This is no way to build our energy future. Instead, we need a comprehensive strategy. In the short run we need to crack down on speculation that's actually spiking up prices. In the long run, we need to invest in alternative energy sources, increase fuel economy standards and improve overall efficiency, all of which would lessen our dependence on foreign oil. The plan put forth today by the majority in the House of Representatives focuses our efforts on the fuel of the past,

when most Americans already agree that it's time to move forward."

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